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Contact:

The North American Menopause Society
Eileen Petridis
Phone: (216) 696-0229
epetridis@fallscommunications.com



Can a History of Migraines Lead to More Severe Hot Flashes for Postmenopausal Women?

New study suggests neurovascular dysregulation may explain link between migraine and hot flashes, as well as their association with heart disease

CLEVELAND, Ohio (September 22, 2021)—Migraines affect more women than men. Hormones appear to be a key reason why. Fluctuating hormone levels can also cause hot flashes. A new study links a history of migraines and hot flashes and highlights the fact that both could be associated with an increased risk of heart disease. Study results will be presented during The North American Menopause Society (NAMS) Annual Meeting in Washington, DC, September 22-25, 2021.

Migraine has a strong female predominance affecting roughly 20% of women. Hormones are believed to play a significant role in triggering migraine, helping explain why women experience more migraine-related symptoms compared to men. Migraines are also associated with cardiovascular events and mortality in women much the same way that vasomotor symptoms (hot flashes) appear to be a biomarker of heart disease.

A prior study investigated the association between migraines and hot flashes and found that a history of migraines predicted an increased frequency of hot flashes in women during the menopause transition. This new study coming out of the Mayo Clinic continues that research and further examines a potential link between a history of migraines and hot flashes, as well as their possible association with an increased risk of heart disease.

This new study involved more than 3,300 women, 27% of whom reported a history of migraine. Study participants were, on average, 52.8 years old, predominantly white (94.5%), educated with at least some college (93%), partnered (84.9%), and postmenopausal (66.6%). After adjusted analysis, the study found that women with a history of migraines had significantly worse menopause symptoms and were more likely to have severe or very severe hot flashes versus no hot flashes when compared to women with no migraine history. In addition, the study found that, while women with low back pain also had worse menopause symptoms, in general, they were no more likely to have experienced severe/very severe hot flashes, thus confirming the specificity of the link between hot flashes and migraines.

“We believe that neurovascular dysregulation may explain the link between migraines and hot flashes, as well as the association of each with cardiovascular disease in women,” says Dr. Stephanie Faubion,

NAMS medical director and lead author for the study. “Given the high prevalence of migraine in women, this association may help identify women who are at risk for more severe hot flashes in midlife. Further study is needed to determine whether the combination of migraine history and hot flashes in midlife predict greater heart disease risk than either alone and whether these female-specific factors could be used to enhance the accuracy of CVD risk calculations for women.”

Dr. Faubion is available for interviews before the presentation at the Annual Meeting.

Founded in 1989, The North American Menopause Society (NAMS) is North America’s leading nonprofit organization dedicated to promoting the health and quality of life of all women during midlife and beyond through an understanding of menopause and healthy aging. Its multidisciplinary membership of 2,000 leaders in the field—including clinical and basic science experts from medicine, nursing, sociology, psychology, nutrition, anthropology, epidemiology, pharmacy, and education—makes NAMS uniquely qualified to serve as the definitive resource for health professionals and the public for accurate, unbiased information about menopause and healthy aging. To learn more about NAMS, visit www.menopause.org.